

## Message Text

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ORIGIN ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-20 PC-04 EB-11 USIE-00 INRE-00

NSCE-00 SSO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

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SEPTEMBER 18, 1973 EXTENSION 20883

APPROVED BY DAVID LAZAR:ARA/CEN

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

AMEMBASSY PANAMA

USCINCSO

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, US, GA

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH RIOS MONTT

REF: GUATEMALA 4458

SUMMARY: RIOS MONTT TOLD CEN OFFICERS THAT HE WOULD ACCEPT PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATIONS OFFERED BY GUATEMALAN CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY (DCG). ACCEPTANCE RESULTED FROM ASSURANCES THAT PRESIDENT CARLOS ARANA HAD NO OBJECTION AND PERSONAL VISIT FROM RENE DELEON DURING WHICH RIOS SAID THAT HE ATTRACTED TO DCG PHILOSOPHY BUT WAS NOT PARTY MEMBER AND WOULD NOT BE PARTISAN CANDIDATE. END SUMMARY

1. BRIGADIER EFRAIN RIOS MONTT REQUESTED CEN OFFICERS

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PEZZULLO AND CLARE MEET WITH HIM AT INTER-AMERICAN DEFENSE

COLLEGE OFFICE AFTERNOON SEPTEMBER 17. ALTHOUGH RIOS BEGAN CONVERSATION BY STATING THAT HE WANTED VIEWS OF "DISINTERESTED OBSERVERS" BEFORE DECIDING WHETHER OR NOT TO ACCEPT DCG PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION, OBVIOUSLY HE HAD ALREADY DECIDED TO ACCEPT.

2. TIMING OF NOMINATION MAY HAVE CAUGHT RIOS BY SURPRISE, AS HE ALLEGED, BUT HE STATED THAT HE HAD BEEN APPROACHED BY DCG SOME TIME BEFORE AND AGREED TO ACCEPT CANDIDACY IF BOTH CARLOS SAGUSTUME AND RENE DE LEON WOULD STEP DOWN. RIOS SAID THAT DE LEON HAD VISITED HIM PREVIOUS SUNDAY (SEPTEMBER 16) TO PERSONALLY EXPLAIN HIS POSITION AND TO OUTLINE DCG

POSTURE. DE LEON CONVINCED RIOS MONTT THAT SAGASTUME WOULD NOT STEP ASIDE BUT THAT MAJORITY OF PR LEADERSHIP AND PARTY BASES WOULD SUPPORT HIS CANDIDACY. DE LEON REPORTEDLY MENTIONED HIS INTEREST IN BECOMING VICE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE; RIOS SAID HE PARRIED BY STATING THAT HE WOULD ACCEPT DCG SPONSORSHIP BUT NOT ITS CONTROL. THOUGH HE AGREED WITH SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY OF DCG (INDEED, HE INDICATED THAT HE WAS ATTRACTED TO DCG BECAUSE IT WAS PART OF A WORLD-WIDE POLITICAL MOVEMENT) HE WAS NOT A PARTY MEMBER AND WOULD NOT AGREE TO RUN SOLELY AS PARTY STANDARD BEARER. HIS CAMPAIGN WOULD NOT BE PARTISAN IN STRICT PARTY SENSE BUT WOULD SEEK TO DRAW SUPPORT FROM ALL SECTORS IN SOCIETY THAT WANTED RETURN TO MORAL GOVERNMENT AND FAIRER SHARE OF FRUITS OF DEVELOPMENT. HE SAID HE TOLD DE LEON THAT IF HE WAS REALLY INTERESTED IN GOOD OF COUNTRY RATHER THAN PERSONAL ADVANTAGE HE WOULD BECOME MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE.

3. RIOS ALLEGED THAT ONLY CONDITION HE HAD ATTACHED TO ACCEPTING NOMINATION WAS PERMISSION OF PRESIDENT ARANA. RIOS SHOWED CEN OFFICE CABLE FROM DCG SECRETARY-GENERAL BARILLAS WHICH STATED THAT ARANA HAD NO OBJECTION. RIOS SAID HE HAD TELEPHONED GENERAL RUBIO THAT MORNING AND, RUBIO HAD SPOKEN WITH ARANA CONFIRMING THAT PRESIDENT HAD NO OBJECTION. NEXT EVENT AFTER ACCEPTING NOMINATION, WHICH HE SAID HE WOULD DO DURING TELEPHONE CALL LATER IN DAY, WAS TO MEET WITH DELEGATION, PRESUMABLY COMPOSED OF CONFIDENTIAL

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DCG AND PR LEADERS, WHICH WOULD COME TO WASHINGTON TO DISCUSS WIDE RANGE OF ISSUES.

4. RIOS ATTRIBUTED HIS NOMINATION IN LARGE MEASURE TO THE SCARE THAT COLONEL ENRIQUE PERALTA HAD CREATED AMONG VARIOUS SECTORS. RIOS RAISED POSSIBILITY THAT ARANA SUPPORTED NOMINATION AS PART OF PLAN TO BLOCK PERALTA'S ASPIRATIONS. NONETHELESS HE BELIEVED THAT GUATEMALAN

PEOPLE "DESERVED A REAL ALTERNATIVE" WHICH RIOS COULD PROVIDE. HE DID NOT BELIEVE HIS CANDIDACY WOULD DIFFICULTIES WITHIN ARMED FORCES, INASMUCH AS MILITARY WOULD ASSUME ITS HISTORIC POSTURE OF UPHOLDING CONSTITUTION, INCLUDING REJECTING POPULAR CHOICE OF POLITICAL LEADERSHIP, WITHOUT TAKING SIDES.

5. COMMENT: IN GENERAL, RIOS HANDLED CONVERSATION EFFECTIVELY. SPEAKING INTENSELY AND WITH GREAT APPARENT SINCERITY, HE DESCRIBED HIMSELF AS A MAN WITH FEW CONFIDANTS AND NOT WIDELY KNOWN IN GUATEMALA, BUT A PERSON WHO WOULD MOVE BEYOND PLATITUDES AND OFFER HONEST GOVERNMENT WITH EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS TO PROVIDE BOTH URBAN AND RURAL EMPLOYMENT. AT THE SAME TIME CEN OFFICERS

WERE STRUCK BY RIOS' APPARENT POLITICAL NAIVETE. EARLIER IN DAY, FOR EXAMPLE, HE HAD ASKED PEZZULLO IF HE COULD COME TO DEPARTMENT TO MAKE TELEPHONE CALL TO ARANA ON "DEPARTMENT'S DIRECT LINE"; DURING AFTERNOON CONVERSATION HE SUGGESTED THAT USG PROVIDE HIM WITH LIST OF KNOWLEDGEABLE GUATEMALANS UPON WHOM HE COULD RELY FOR ADVICE. WHETHER SUCH REQUEST MADE INNOCENTLY (AS IS PROBABLE) OR SLYLY (WHICH IS POSSIBLE), THEY REVEALED LACK OF POLITICAL ACUMEN.

6. IN RESPONSE TO THESE AND SIMILAR QUERIES, DEPARTMENT OFFICERS STATED USG WELCOMED FREE PLAY OF LEGITIMATE POLITICAL ACTIVITY AND VIEWED ELECTORAL PROCESS AS SIGNIFICANT EVENT WHEREVER TAKING PLACE. RIOS WAS OFFERED BRIEFING ON USG POLICIES PARTICULARLY IN ECONOMIC FIELD.

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